



BUILDING BCTS

Story by SGT Tim Usrey

THE Army's new brigade combat teams will have fewer soldiers; new, lighter vehicles; and will depend more than ever before on intelligence.

But officials at Fort Lewis, Wash., where the first two interim BCTs are located, said they'll be more capable of performing their missions.

"Lots of infantry, lots of mortars and lots of snipers" is how MAJ Jack Murphy described the new teams' makeup. Murphy is a transformation project officer for the I Corps-based brigades that were identified for restructuring in November 1999. They are the 3rd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division, and 1st Bde., 25th Inf. Div.

Murphy said each brigade will have

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about 3,700 soldiers — approximately 700 fewer than the current number — and will include three mechanized infantry battalions and a reconnaissance, surveillance and target acquisition squadron, the intelligence-gathering component for the brigade.

These elements will comprise about 75 percent of the brigade combat team. With additional assets tailored to meet each mission, the BCTs will be able to participate in theater wars as well as smaller-scale contingency operations in hot spots around the world, including those in urban terrain, Murphy said.

Since announcement of the transformation, soldiers at Fort Lewis have considered what the inevitable trade-in of their Bradley fighting vehicles and M1 Abrams tanks for a

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INITIAL BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM DESIGN



The new brigade combat teams will incorporate infantry, cavalry and a variety of supporting units, and will consist of either wheeled vehicles (as indicated by this chart) or both wheeled and tracked vehicles.

lighter, more mobile gun system — which can be loaded aboard a C-130 Hercules aircraft — will mean, Murphy said.

“Many agree we don’t necessarily need a tank,” Murphy said. “We need a gun that can blow holes in buildings and still keep up with a 5-ton truck.”

“I thought the soldiers would be apprehensive,” added MAJ Jack Bonvouloir, a spokesman for transformation at Fort Lewis. “But they’re not. They realize they’re at the tip of the spear of this revolutionary change and are very excited about it.”

In early March, soldiers from Fort Lewis’ 3rd Bde. — the first of the two brigades to transition — received LAV-III armored personnel carriers that are on loan from the Canadian army. The U.S. Army is currently

considering the LAV-III APC, among others, as its new BCT vehicle.

And in April, the brigade began turning in its Bradley fighting vehicles and M1 tanks, Bonvouloir said. In early summer the unit had begun training with the LAV-IIIs.

The 1st Bde. is expected to begin transitioning in January 2001.

“The initial BCTs will have a more robust intelligence capability, down to the company level,” Murphy said, “so that they won’t find the fight by bumping into it.”

Technologies for improved communications in the field — similar to computer software currently available to browse the Internet, chat on-line and download photos and movies — could be incorporated into BCT vehicles to provide real-time information such as

enemy positions and minefield locations, Murphy said.

As a result, soldiers who discover a damaged road, for example, would be able to take a picture of it and upload the image into the brigade’s computer network.

Within minutes, other units in the brigade could use the information to plan alternate routes, while engineers begin reopening the damaged route. The intelligence will also allow each unit to make logistics decisions based on changing mission needs.

“Everybody’s going 100 miles an hour right now to move forward on the restructuring,” Bonvouloir said. Meantime, much has yet to be determined about exactly how the BCT will ultimately look and what tactics it will employ to fight, he said. □